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All literature teachers agree that students should read with perception, enjoy reading, and continue reading after classes have ended. Because perception promotes the pleasure that leads to continued reading, the basic step toward improved reading is to increase perception. The "index-card" system, which focuses attention on textual explication, invites the student to react to a story and to record on cards his responses, together with the lines or details that prompted them. Then, in class discussion of noted passages, the students can compare their reactions and ideas. Such an approach benefits the teacher because he becomes sensitive to precisely how students respond to particular works and he receives, through their various viewpoints, the raw materials which he can use in a discussion of the work. More importantly, this method benefits the student by encouraging him to respond to the work, to share ideas with his classmates, and to evaluate his own insights through the class discussion. The pleasure derived from increased perception then leads to additional attempts to understand the story more completely. (LH)

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the rewards of rigorous reading

However diverse their critical theories, however perverse their theories of education, teachers of literature stand united on three fundamental objectives. They want their students to read with perception. They want their students to read with pleasure. And they want their students to continue reading and making independent literary judgments after the classes have ceased and coercion of grades ended.

It is a perfectly obvious truism that students will repeat pleasurable experiences. In reading, pleasure depends upon perception. No student can respond with satisfaction to that which he cannot comprehend. Ask any unenthusiastic non-reader of poetry, for example, to explain his aversion and the inevitable explanation follows: lack of understanding undercuts response. The teacher of literature must seek to institute a necessary cycle. Increase comprehension and thereby increase satisfaction. Enjoyment, delight, pleasure: these stem from understanding, and encourage further student involvement with literary materials. Greater experience means added background and almost assures the teacher of improving responses. In brief, PERCEPTION PROMOTES PLEASURE. And pleasure leads circuitously back to better reading skills. The obvious pedagogical questions loom large: how can the cycle be started? How can perception be increased?

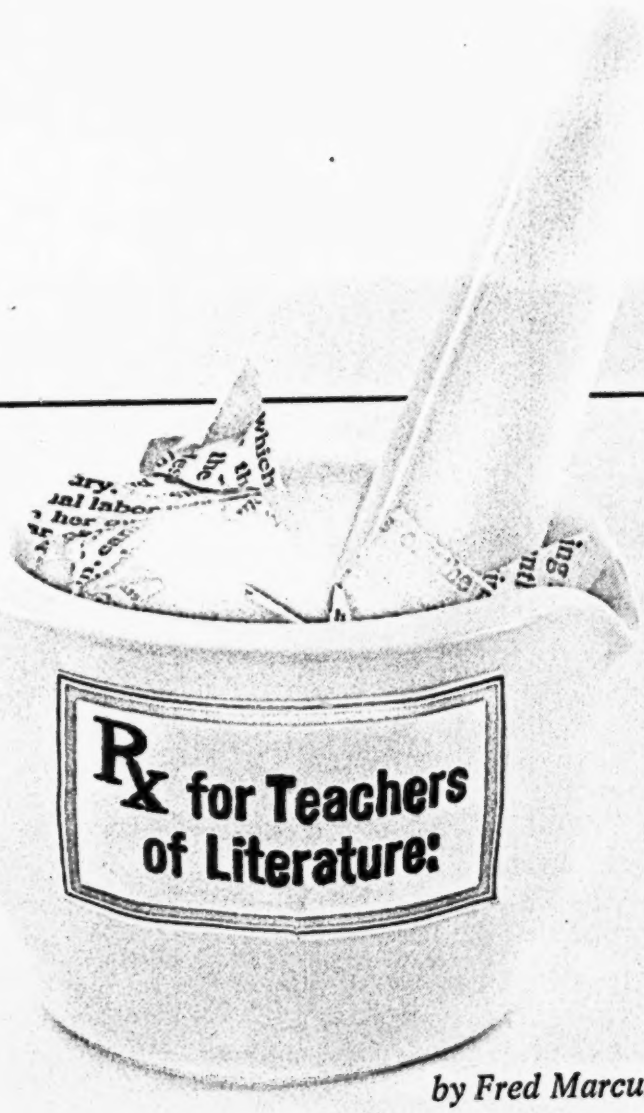
Literature, unlike moral preachment, communicates by indirection. From the details of a story, we draw inferences. From the particulars of characterization, we respond to the actors. From the specifics of the plot, we are caught up and respond. Central to the drawing of appropriate inferences, to relevant involvement, understanding the nuances of characterization is astute observation. The reader who attends to details responds to a richer tapestry.

Any device encouraging attention to details, to scrutiny of potent particulars, can initiate the perception-pleasure-perception cycle. One simple pedagogical device that focuses attention on textual explication is the "index-card" system. Students begin by reading a story and responding to it. They are then encouraged to ask themselves precisely what *in the story* prompted their responses. And they are asked to seek out those particular lines or details that carry significant meanings for them. They literally identify specific lines or paragraphs. Obviously, no two students would select the same groups of lines. Indeed, two students centering on a common detail would probably make different observations. If the teacher elects to formalize the index-card method, (and I recommend he do so) he will ask his students to select several lines, copy each on a separate index card, and write out his responses following each springboard quotation. These might be handed in to the teacher before the discussion begins.

What, exactly, is occurring? Students are beginning to link their responses—usually in the form of inferences and generalizations—to concrete particulars in the story. Relevancy, documentation of judgments, textual evidence, tonal quality in the story: these replace unsupported assertions, irrelevant responses, stock responses, vague "feelings." Moreover, students begin to discover, in the class discussion, the diversity of responses produced by individual lines. Variety of interpretations (all are not equally good), differences in perception: these enrich the discussion. Challenges and defenses of interpretation add to the spirited quality of the class sessions. Students' statements can be linked to questions by the teacher: What lines in the story led you to suggest_____? or, How does the last line on the next page fit into your interpretation, etc?

Pedagogically, the student's selection of key lines and the writing of his responses adds a potent psychological ingredient to the class discussion. Each student now has a vested interest and personal involvement in the direction of the class discussion and the observations made by either the teacher or some classmate. Out of the process comes a diversity of responses, many enlarging the individual student's initial personal perception. All benefit from the group insights revealed.

If the teacher wishes, he can also exploit an attractive pedagogical device in controlling the direction of the class discussion. I call this technique the "sieve" theory. The teacher begins with a question about a paragraph or line in the story. Student responses will vary in quality. What does the teacher do with the variety of responses? First, he can choose to neglect some. Unpromising or irrelevant responses need use no more time in the discussion. Moreover, weak responses need not be publicly rebuffed; they are quietly shunted aside. Students reticent about contributing have an easier environment. Moreover, if students have turned in index cards, they have a motive for giving support to a position they espouse. The teacher's acceptance of many responses encourage the richness of interpretation that



by Fred Marcus

literary materials permit. If the index-card method is common, students become accustomed to responding to questions that seek out precise meanings and interpretations of details. They may even be encouraged to augment their responses by linking lines to other appropriate story lines strengthening their perceptions. One teacher-directed question may elicit a host of insights as he pursues some responses, elaborates upon others, and neglects still others. The teacher uses his "sieve" to sift out those responses most useful to the whole, to increasing awareness. His is the controlling hand at the tiller of class discussion. And so student X's response to a question leadsto another question exploring the implications in his response and a variety of student responses flow in, and again the teacher charts his course. The emphasis is always on perceptions that lead back into the story, avoiding the pleasant but not too useful "general" discussions in which the story disappears while the topic remains. The sieve technique permits the teacher to guide the discussion along the lines of textual re-examination while layers of meaning are unpeeled. The rewards of textual analysis include linking student insights with a responsible method of assessing literature.

Fred Marcus, a frequent contributor to M&M, teaches in the English department at California State College, Los Angeles. He is the author of Perception and Pleasure / Stories for Analysis *(1967) which applies the theories described here.*

A specific reward for the bright student in this procedure stems from his awareness of his contributing role. Yet the sieve method also builds in protective coloration; he is not too publicly identified, with the ever-present danger of some resentment from less perceptive classmates. Indeed, as the totality of class perception grows, there is a mutual sharing in the increased awareness of the insights being reaped. Stories and poems grow greater, yield more, and encourage the further use of textual analysis. While some students complain about tearing a story or poem apart, English teachers know from experience that analytic readers delight in the give and take of rich textual examination. The process opens up an increasing spectrum of insights. As critical power grows, pleasure is enhanced, never diminished. More and more, students become conscious of the returns yielded by careful scrutiny of story details. More and more, we are cultivating meaningful student response.

The mechanics of the index-card system also produce benefits. Students compare cards (responses), re-read stories more carefully, link their generalizations to relevant particulars from the literature itself. As for the teacher, the system offers two tangential pluses in addition to greater success in teaching reading. Occasionally, he will enhance his own perceptions as he experiences vicariously a host of class responses. Often, he will become increasingly sensitive to precisely *how* students respond to particular works. Reading student cards tells him quickly what perceptions they have initially and which require more concentrated efforts on his part. The index cards can serve as a source for his appending added personal comments based on students' observations. He can applaud his students, question them, suggest alternative views, challenge their views, encourage related reading—all on an individual basis. Students begin to look forward to the teacher's observations and comments, compare them, respond to them, and even re-read in the light of the suggestions. The process stimulates keener reading and inevitably produces more effective reading. At this point, the cycle is operating. At first, greater perception may be only a concomitant of more careful text scrutiny, but any initial success prods the process. A single new insight, a single moment of pleasure augmented by better understanding, a willingness (even an eagerness) to repeat the experience: these are the components that finally result in increasing perception. And increasing pleasure! □